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THE

MOUNTAIN SCOUT

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CAPTURE OF FORT HAMBY.

A Thrilling Story of the War.

BY

REV. W. R. GWALTNEY, D. D.

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE.

The following Thrilling account of the troubles, in this section, just about the close of the war of 1861–4 was published in the Scout in June. Quite a number of our citizens have expressed a desire for a copy of it to lay away and keep for their children to read. Yielding to the many requests made we have concluded to place it before the people in the form of a pamphlet and we hope that it may find its way into every home within the territory covered by Wade and his hand. The Author, being a participant in the capture of Wade's band, has given the facts as seen by an eye witness.

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CAPTURE OF FORT HAMBY

OR A

THRILLING STORY OF THE WAR.

Rev. Dr. W. R. Gwaltney writes of the Heroism, of Confederates at Fort Hamby.

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In March 1865, General Stoneman left East Tennessee, moving from Taylorsville, Tenn., through Watauga county to Deep Gap in the Blue Ridge. On the 26th of March he entered Boone, N. C., and on the day following the column was divided, one division under General Stoneman marching towards Wilkesboro, while the other, under General Gilliam, crossed the Blue Ridge at Blowing Rock and went to Patterson, in Caldwell county, there joined General Stoneman at Wilkesboro. On the 31st of March General Stoneman moved over into Surry county, going toward Mt. Airy. During Stoneman's march through this section of the State, his men committed many depredations. After leaving Wilkesboro a number of the lawless of his command deserted Stoneman's army, and other worthless characters led by two desperate men, Wade and Simmons, completely terrorized Wilkes and portions of other counties by their frequent raids. They would ride into the yard, dismount and several of them would enter the house, and one or more would point loaded pistols or guns at any person or persons who might be in the house, saying "if you open your mouth we will drop you in your tracks." while others would go through every trunk and drawer to be found, taking with them everything that suited them and every good horse on the plantation. It must be remembered that at that time almost every man

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fit for millitary services was in the army and the country was almost completely at the mercy of the robbers. After Lee's surrender and the Confederate soldiers began to return home this state of affairs continued. These marauders then divided into two bands, one led by Simmons with head-quarters in the Brushy Mountains, the other led by Wade. who had headquarters on the Yadkin River, in Wilkes county. Several times these two bands operated together. But as the writer had to deal with Wade's band, and with it had a most lively experience, this article will be devoted to him and his fiendish work. He claimed the rank of major in Stoneman's army and said he was from Michigan. The house in which he fortified was on the road leading from Wilkesboro to Lenoir, and nearly a mile from Holmans Ford, where the valley road crosses the Yadkin River, The house was situated on a high hill commanding a fine view of the Yadkin Valley and of the valley road for a distance of a mile above and a mile below the ford, The house fronted the river on the South. On the West Lewis Fork, a stream smaller that the Yadkin River, emptied into it. On the North and East lay a wide belt of thick woods. In this section were many sympathizers if not aiders and abettors of the band. From this position the Yadkin Valley and the surrounding country for at least a half mile in every direction could be swept and controlled by Wade's guns. There is a legend that on this very hill Daniel Boone was fortified against the Indians. It would have been difficult to have chosen a stronger location both offensive and defensive, than this. The house was built of logs, two stories high. The robbers had cut port holes for their guns in the upper story. They were army guns of the best type and could command the approach to the house from all directions. There would be nothing more hazardous than to attempt to reach it. This house belonged to some disreputable woman by the name of Hamby and after Wade had fortified and occupied it the name by which it was known was Fort Hamby. It is not known just how many men were engaged in these depredations. Perhaps the number actually engaged was not more than thirty. A list of eighteen names was found when the fort was taken, but more than that number was known to co-operate with them. They

showed a spirit of revenge and a desire for plunder in all their raids. Indeed they seemed to think that they must treat with the utmost cruelty all who were not in sympathy with them. They were brave men and well drilled. All the people of Wilkes county lived in constant dread of them—frightened by the bark of a dog or the rattling of the leaves. Life seemed worse than death. All Wilkes county was subdued by them. They made several rades into Alexander and Caldwell counties, robbing the citizens and subjecting men and women to the grossest insults. On the 7th ef May 1865 they made a rade into Caldwell county. Major Harvey Bingham, with a few men, made a well planned move on the fort Sunday night following. It seems that Wade and his men were not aware of Bingham's approach until he and his men had entered the house. Wade and his men announced their helpless condition and begged for their lives. No guns being seen Binhham believed them his prisioners, They gave Wade and his men time to dress, after which at a moment when the captors were off their guard, they rushed to their guns which were concealed about their beds and opened fired on them. The result was that Clark, a son of General Clark, of Caldwell county, and Henly of the same county, were killed. The others escaped, leaving the bodies of Clark and Henly.

The Saturday night following they crossed over into Alexander county, intending to capture and kill W. C. Green, son of Rev. J. R. Green, who had been a lieutenant in the confederate army, Rev. Mr. Green had been informed of the expressed purpose to kill his son, and they were on the lookout for them and were ready to give them a warm reception. They surrounded the house, and Wade had on a Confederate grey suit which he always carried with him when he wanted to enter a house without forcing his way into it. He claimed to be an officer in the Confedrate army and was returning home and desired a night's lodging. The moon was shining brightly. Mr. Green could see him and his men and said: "I know you and you can not come in here unless you come in over my dead body," Mr. Green had his position at the front door with a pistol in one hand and a dirk in the other. His son was at the front window and his daughter at another window armed with a knife of

long keen blade They had taken five of their servants into their confidence and armed them also and placed them into the rear of the house. Three of the gang were about to enter through a window in the rear part of the building and Lieutenant Green hearing it, rushed to the place and knocked out a pane of glass and fired at them, slightly wounding one of them. They withdrew, leaving two of their horses and two or three hats and went in haste back to the fort. The next day (Tuesday) Col. Washington Sharpe gathered to gether about twenty men, old soldiers who had returned from Appomattax, and pursued them, James Linney, Brother of Hon. R. Z. Linney, and Jones Brown were killed and left in the yard. The others, some of them springing from their horses and running on foot, escaped. They managed to get together at Moravian Falls and returned home greatly dejected, while the robbers were greatly emboldened by their two victories in one week. The loss of Linney and Brown cast the darkest shadow of gloom and sadness over the whole community.

The burning question was asked by every one, "what is going to be done?" Some thought that there was little or no hope of anything being done —Some who had been, were really afraid to go again and did not go.

Now the writer must speak as an eyewitness of all that follows, After returning from the army I took a small school in Alexander county and boarded in the home of Ellis Haynes, Esq. The company which was driven from the fort the Sunday before was made up in this community.

Col. Sharpe called together and held a consultation with a number of the old soldiers and it was soon decided that another effort should be made to dislodge them and put an end to the work of plunder and murder. I left my school in the hands of one of my pupils and joined the company. We started on Tuesday after-noon following the Sunday on which our Alexander men had been repulsed. The company numbered about twenty men. Having crossed the Brushy Mountains at Cove Gap just before reaching Moravain Falls, in Wilkes county, we met a man near Holman's Ford who told us that Wade was looking for us and he declaired he could whip a thousand of us, and he hoped we would come on. We stopped and held a consultation

sent one of our men into Iredell county to ask Col. Robt. V. Cowman, who had commanded the 33rd Regiment of N, C. Troopers in the war just closed, to gather up all the returned soldiers he could and come to Holman's Ford with all possible speed. We sent another one of our number to the headquarters of a portion of the Federal army encamped near Lexington, N. C., to inform them of the condition of things in Wilkes county, and to ask them to send and relieve the situation as early as they possibly could. We then went on, reaching Moravian Falls about sun-set, and remained there till near midnight, and then moved slowly and cautiously up the road leading to Holmens Ford. The night was dark, or the after part of it, and all felt that the march was fraught with danger. Coming within a mile or less of the ford, a voice rang out sharp and clear: "Halt, who comes there?" Col. Sharpe replied: "Men from Alexander: Who are you?" The answer came, "Oxford's men from Caldwell county. "Advance" This was good news to us. We found Oxford's men all sleeping soundly in the woods near the road except two or three who were walking the sentinels's beat, We shared the bed of leaves till break of day and then the call came for all to rise and fall into line. The two companies to gether numbered not more than forty men. We left the road leading to the ford and turned up the river to the left and crossed at a small ford on the farm of a Mr. Tolbert and then ascended a hill to the valley road and dismounted and fed our horses and opened our haver sacks and ate breakfast in the yard of Mr. Tolbert. In his house a woman was dying, who with her husband the day before was approaching the ford in a wagon and was shot by one of the robbers from the fort more than a quarter of a mile distant. While here Mr. Tolbert said to us: "You can easily judge what my fears of these robbers are and my feelings toward them, but I dare not say a word. My advice to you all is that you go back home for with that force you will not be able to take them. They are on the lookout for you, and they have doubtless sent to their sympathizers for recruits, and should they capture you they will surely kill you, and no doubt now they are lying in those thickets waiting in ambush for you, and as soon as you turn the top of that hill you

are in danger of being shot down. We held a counsel of war. A few of our bravest men were in favor of going back and waiting till we could rally a stronger force. By a large majority it was decided to go on. After passing the top of the hill and coming to a little narrow foot-path leading through a long stretch of thicket and old field pines, the Colonel said to me: "You take these five men and follow this path till you reach the hill yonder on the West of the fort between which hill and the fort runs Lewis Fork. Feel your way carfully through the thicket and when you reach the hill scour it all over and see that their is no one on it. I will take the company on horses and station them on the North and East of the fort and then we have them surrounded with the Yadkin River on the South. When the men are stationed a gun will be fired on the East that you may know that we are in place. I took the five men and we went single file one after another, expecting every step to be shot down. We breathed not a free breath until we reached the hill and scoured it all over and found no one on it. We had been in many places of danger during the war, but never had our courage been tried as it was in this march through that thicket. We felt that an enemy whom we could not see was about to drop us in our tracks in constant expectation of being shot into enternity. We were never so conscious of safety as when we reached that hill where we felt that in the fight we could see the foe. We had been on that hill only a few minutes when one of the robbers was seen leaving the fort and going into the field below where several fine horses were grazing. He bridled one of them, and while bridling the horse the writer ran down the hill about twenty yards toward the creek (Lewis' Fork) and from a pine tree was trying to get a shot at the robber. But there being so many trees in the way he led the horse rapidly away beyond some thickly timbered land and was out of sight. In less than five minutes I heard the gun of one of my men on the hill top snap. I looked and saw that he was pointing his gun towards the creek below me. His gun snapped several times. I knew that he was trying to shoot one of Wade's band, but I could not see him, but I felt that the man was between me and the creek. Then I saw another one of my men slip his gun to the one whose gun kept snapping, He reached his hand and took hold

of the muzzle of the gun and pulled it to him.

He raised it to his face and I thought I never heard a gun roar louder. He shot at one of tho robbers sitting on the bank of the creek, but missed him. He pitched forward into the creek and ran it towards the Yadkin. The creek was so over hung with under growth that we saw no more of him. We supposed he was then watching for our approach. If he knew of our presence till fired on we knew not. The warning he got saved his life, for he did not return to the fort. Our men kept up firing on the house all day and they returned the fire at us, and shot with such accuracy that we had to keep at a great distance behind trees and logs. In a very few minutes after the shot was fired at the robber on the creek bank one of the men from the east of the fort fired his gun to let us know that all were stationed. Then such a yell was raised in the fort as we never heard before or since. The most fearful oaths. It was more like the howling of devils, cursing us and daring us to come on; evidently trying to make it appear that they were there in strong force.

Night came on and it was a very dark cloudy night. Another counsel of war was held. Some advised that in view of our small numbers and the probabilty of their bringing in recruits that night and surrounding us, that it would be the part of wisdom to with draw and wait till we could rally greater forces. Others said if we did not dislodge them then that they would never return for another effort. A majority of us declared that we could whip all the recruits that might come and that we must stay till the fort was taken saying: "Death is preferable to the miserable life which they are causing us to lead, and live or die let us stay till the work is done." We stayed. And in the darkness we constructed a new line of breast-works near the fort and kept on shooting at the house for some time after dark. The enemy fired no more after it became too dark for them to see us. We had in our Alexander company a man from Iredell county by the name of Wallace Sharpe. He went by the name of Wall Sharpe. His station was near the spring and between him and the fort and very near it stood the old kitchen built of small pine logs, covered with boards and it was very old and dry. Wall Sharpe, as soon as he could see signs of approaching day, pulled off his

shoes and very quietly made his way to the old kitchen and pushed some dry trash into a crack and struck a match and touched it and then ran back to his station. Soon the whole kitchen was ablaze, and you may be sure that no fire was ever more eagerly watched. Very soon the sparks began to fall on the roof of the fort. And soon little blazes sprang up here and there on the roof. Our men raised a shout for joy.

Then the robbers raised a yell. The call for a surrender by one of our men was heard. They asked what we would do with them if they surrendered. Wall Sharpe replied with an oath: "We will kill the last one of you." They came out with Wade in front. He raised his hand and touched his hat as though he would surrender and then darted like an arrow down the steep hill towards the river and so on through the line, our men firing several shots at him, but it being too dark to see, not a snigle shot hit him. He ran across the bottom to the Yadkin river and hid under the bank of the river. With all our searching we failed to find him. He told some one afterwards that some of our men came within five or six feet of him. We tracked him to the river, but could get no further trace of him. Such strides as he made across the bottom, according to his tracks, it did not seem possible to be made by men. As soon as the others came out they were seized by the soldiers, and for a few minutes it seemed that they would be torn to pieces. They were in the hands of men whose mothers, wives and sisters they had insulted. The whole company was for a little time an infuriated mob. Then for the first time some of us were impressed with the fact that there is nothing so much to be feared as a company of men so enraged as to loose their heads.

Men were comanded to climb to the top of the house and extinguish the fire, so that sufficient time would be had to ascertain what was concealed therein. Property of nearly every description was found. Many fine dresses and ladies hats which they had taken from the desolute woman who occupied the house. Many fine horses were in the pasture near by—about twenty. They were returned to their owners. Stakes having been erected for their execution, they were told that they must die, They begged to be imprisoned for life, but were told that they must be disposed

of summarily, as they had desposed of Clark, Henly, Linney and Brown. Passing with them through the yard to the place of execution, Colonel Sharpe told them that they could have a little while to make any preparation for death, should they so desire: They began praying but their prayer was, "Men spare us!" Wall Sharpe said with an oath, "don't pray to us. Pray to God. He alone can save you." Some of the men still burning with rage began to ridicule, and mock them, Wall Sharpe said: "Men, we have given them time to repent, and you shall not bother them."

Col. Sharpe then commanded every one to be quiet. All was still. He then turned to me and asked me to pray for them. I replied, "Colonel, I cannot, for I never had such feelings as I now have." I feared to approach the throne of grace just then lest I might come into His presence without sincere desires, Rev. Isaac Oxford, captian of the Caldwell company, said to me, "Hold my gun and I will pray for them." I took his gun and he thanked God that none of us were killed and that justice had overtaken them at last, and this was about the burden of his prayer which was nothing more than a thanksgiving.

We then moved on to the place of execution and bound them to stakes. But before they were executed. I said "Colonel, I feel a desire to pray for them now." He said he would be glad for me to do so. I tried to pray for their forgiveness and salvation with all the earnestness of my soul. In a moment the comand was given to fire, and they were in eternity. It may be interesting to relate in this connection an incident: In our Alexander company was a young man whose name was Fony Roseman who could shoot a rifle with great assurancy. He was a devoted friend of James Linney, who was killed there the Sunday before. He had learned from one of the robbers that Will Beck was the one who killed Linney. They had dug a hole into which they had thrown Linney's body and covered it up. Taking up his body it was seen that the Minnie ball had entered just above his right eye. Roseman asked Col. Sharpe to make him one of the detail to shoot Beck. This request was granted. He said, "Now, I am going to hit him just above the eye in the same spot where he hit my friend Linney. He did just what he said he would do as though he had gone and placed it there with his fingers.

The question then came up as to what we should do with the house. Without much discussion it was decided that it should be burnt down. There were several barrels of unshelled corn in the upper story of the building which was all thrown out through a window, and soon the house was all in a blaze. When the flames reached the basement the firing of loaded guns was like a heavy skirmish. How many guns and how much ammunition they had stored away we were not able to tell.

Wade was seen by some one in that vicinity not many days afterwards. He said he lay all day under the bank of the river, and some time in the night he came out and walked around and saw what had been done and then went away. He said he should leave that part of the country very soon. He has never been seen or heard of since. On our way back to Alexander county we met Col. Cowan, of Iredell county with twelve or fifteen men coming to our assistance, We also met some of the citizens of Wilkes county coming with wagon loads of provisions for us. When they heard what had been done their joy must have been as great as that which thrilled the hearts of our forefathers when they received news of the victory of Yorktown.

The next morning before starting to my school I saw coming down the road from the direction of Fort Hamby twelve men on horseback. They had on blue uniforms, which all the robbers wore. My only thought was that they were some of the recruits who were expected at Fort Hamby and that they were after taking vengeance on all who had taken part in the work done the day before, As they approached the gate, I was boarding in the home of Ellis Haynes, Esq., I went into my room which was on the first floor and locked myself in and looked to the condition of several guns and pistols which I kept loaded all the time, determined to sell my life as dear as possible. They dismounted and came in and asked if they could get breakfast and their horses fed. Mr. Haynes told them they could. They took seats on the front porch and entered in lively conversation with Mr. Haynes, Of course I was listening, From all I could hear I began to think that perhaps they were not the men I had taken them to be. I walked out in their midst, They asked me if I knew anything of a band of robbers near Holman's Ford,

in Wilkes county. I told them I did. They said also that they had heard that the fort had been taken and the band dislodged and wished to know if it weas true. I told them it was true. They wished to know if I was there and took part in it. I told them I was there and took part in it. Being still uncertain as to who they were and what their mission might be I determined not to tell who else helped take it, should they ask me. They then asked me what we did unto those robbers I replied that we tied them to stakes and shot them. The lieutenant in command said: "I am glad of it, for if we had taken them we should have executed them." He then told us that the message which we sent while on our way to Fort Hamby had reached their head-quarters and that they were on their way to settle all these troubles and put an end to all the lawlesness. It can be truthfully said that no men from whatever section ever came into that part of our State who were more cordially welcomed. The lieutenant had thirty-one men in his command on that trip, but two other divisions of them had gone to other places for breakfast.

SIMMONS.

They went into the mountains and captured the notorious Simmons, whose name has been mentioned in connection with that of Wade. They took him to their encampment near Lexington, N. C., and put him into the guard house. While plundering and murdering in the mountains he had supplied himself with a good sum of gold and silver with some of which he bribed the sentinel and got away, and has never been heard from since in those parts.

In August, 1865, I was asked to open up a school in Wilkesboro and entered upon the work the first of September. The school house was on a high ridge West of the town nearly a mile from the court house. I boarded in the home of Mr. H. Curtis, at the ford of the Yadkin River on the road leading from Wilkesboro to Jefferson, in Ashe county. It was just one mile from Mr. Curtis's to the court house, and about a quarter of a mile to the school house. I went to my boarding place each day for dinner, as did also his son, and daughter and a young lady who was boarding there. The first week in October the first court that had been held in a long time was in session, presided over by Judge Anderson Mitchell of Statesville. One day dur-

ing that week, just after dinner, while in the sitting room with the two sons and three daughters of Mr. Curtis and the young lady who was boarding in the family, two men rode up to the gate and into the yard and right up to the window of the room in which we were sitting and one asked Judson, the eldest son of Mr. Curtis for powder to load his pistol, saying with an oath that he had just shot at a rebel and must have puwder to reload, Judson told him he could not get it. He replied that he would then come in and take it by force. Judson then turned to me and said, "What must I do?" I replied, do not let him have it from now until noon on Doom's Day, and if he attempts to come in here we will kill him."

On two occasions before this the Hamby gang had entered this home and rifled every trunk and drawer and broken up furniture, and these two men were known to be their sympathizers. He then rode to a negro cabin near by and learning where Mr. Curtis was at work, galloped up to him, pointing his pistol at his head. "Give me powder to load my pistol or I will blow your brains out." Mr. Curtis replied: If you get powder from me you will get it burnt." He came into the house as pale as a corps and told his younger son, Finley, to go into a small room in the rear of the building and load those guns as quick as possible. Finley and I had them loaded perhaps in less than five minutes. The young man demanding the powder was still in the yard on his horse. I took my stand at the front window and turned to Mr. Curtis and said: "I want you to understand that I propose to kill him if he attempts to come in." He said. "That is exactly what I want you to do."

The man had dismounted and was throwing the bridle rein over the horse rack. At this moment Mr. Curtis's oldest daughter came to me frantic with fear, begging me to put down the gun and let him come in and take what he would, saying if we resisted some one would be killed. I bade her go to the rear part of the building where she would be out of danger, and to go at once, saying that I would rather die than to live in this way. Finley had taken his position at the front door, and his father at the parlor window. Seeing that we were armed and ready, he at once remounted, and leaving the other man on his horse at the gate, said to him. "You remain till I return. I will go to town

and get my crowd and will come back to get what I want." He gallopped away toward town. I went out to the gate and told the one remaning to take his companion away as soon as he returned; that we did not wish to hurt any one. He said to me, "You have guns in that house, have you not?" He was told that it was ours to know what we had. In the meantime we sent Judson Curtis down the river through the bottoms to the court house to inform the Judge and Sheriff of what was going on, I sent the two young ladies who were my pupils to the school house to tell the young men there and who had been soldiers in the war to come to me immediately. They came and I had not more than time to tell them what was up, before he with eight or ten others came galloping down the hill with their pistols, and as they approached the gate we all moved into the hocse and took our places with our guns. They saw us when they reached the gate. He stopped and said: "Here is the place." Seeing our increased force and the advantage we had in the house they took his horse's bridle and said, "Come on, come on," and on they went across the ford and clear out of sight. That night the Sheriff with a posse of men pursued them and captured the two first mentioned and carried them before Judge Mitchell, who imposed a fine on each and sent them to jail for a term of months. When the Judge sentenced the young man to jail he told him that if he had persisted in going into that house that he would have been killed. In a few days the young man sent his mother word to sell his pistols, saying that he never expected to buckle one on again while he lived, They served out their time in prison and both became good citizens, and so far as I know they may be living today. This was the last of the troubles that followed the war in all that section of the State.

W. R. Gwaltney.